

## CHARLES FRANCIS STOKES, SURGEON GENERAL, UNITED STATES NAVY (1910-14)

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THE fourteenth Surgeon General, United States Navy, and the eighteenth Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, was born in Brooklyn, New York, on February 20, 1863. He received his medical degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, in 1884, and was an interne at Bellevue and the first house surgeon of the newly erected Gouverneur Hospital. He was appointed from New York as an assistant surgeon of the Navy on February 1, 1889, his commission being signed by President Grover Cleveland. His first duty was on the *U.S.S. Minnesota*, then the receiving ship at the Navy Yard, New York. He then served in the Naval Hospital, Mare Island, California, and subsequently at the Naval Hospital, Yokohama, Japan. During the Spanish-American War he was operating surgeon on the *U.S.S. Solace*, the new hospital ship, and the first of our hospital ships to fly the Red Cross flag. He then served as professor of surgery at the Naval Medical School, Washington, D.C. During the cruise of the Atlantic Fleet around the world in 1908, he commanded the *U.S.S. Relief*. He was appointed by President Taft as Surgeon General of the Navy on February 5, 1910, and held office until February 6, 1914.

He was widely known as a skillful surgeon and is remembered in the Navy today by the Stokes stretcher which was devised by him. This

stretcher has proved of remarkable value in the transportation of sick and injured up and down the narrow ladders and through small manholes and hatches on board ship, and such inac-



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cessible places as firerooms, fighting tops, and turrets. In it a patient can be lowered into a boat in comfort and safety. By simple and ingenious fittings the stretcher was made to combine splinting for fractures with the function of a litter for transportation. This stretcher gave the Navy many advantages in the transport of patients, and has been copied in foreign navies. There is an interesting story in regard

to this stretcher and its inventor. Doctor Stokes, who had retired in June 1917, was, in 1926, visiting the display of naval medicine in the exhibits of the American Medical Association held in Washington, D.C. He manifested much interest in the Stokes stretcher, and the polite and efficient hospital corpsman on duty with the exhibit explained the stretcher and its uses at great length. Admiral Stitt, the Surgeon General, came up at that time and greeted the former Surgeon General, and the hospital corpsman found that he had been explaining the stretcher to its inventor. Stokes praised the corpsman for his knowledge of the stretcher and its uses, telling Admiral Stitt that he hoped all members of the Medical Department were as well acquainted with its use.

Honolulu and the Hawaiian Islands were being recognized as a strategic center of prime importance, and in connection with the development of naval facilities there, the United States Naval Hospital, Pearl Harbor, was planned and built during Stokes's administration of the Bureau. Admiral Stokes had great interest in hospital ships and plans were made in his regime for additions to these important auxiliary craft, which later materialized in the hospital ships *Mercy* and *Relief*. The latter was the first vessel of a modern navy to be designed and laid down as a hospital ship, previous vessels of this class having been converted from liners.

An historical General Order which was one of the greatest factors in banishing typhoid fever from the Navy and is a landmark in naval medicine,

was issued during Stokes administration. This General Order is reproduced here:

# "GENERAL ORDER

No. 133

Navy Department,  
Washington, D.C., December 1, 1911.

"1. As soon as practicable after the receipt of this order, typhoid prophylactic will be administered to all officers and enlisted men of the Navy and Marine Corps, under the age of 45 years, who have not already received it or who have not already had a well-defined case of typhoid fever. Officers and enlisted men on leave, or on duty where no medical officer is available, will receive the typhoid prophylactic upon their arrival at the first station where this measure is practicable.

"2. Typhoid prophylactic will be administered to all recruits under 45 years of age immediately upon their arrival at a training station, receiving ship, or marine recruit depot. This applies to all men reenlisting who have not received the prophylactic treatment within two years previously or had a well-defined case of typhoid fever; in case of doubt the prophylactic will be administered. Every applicant for enlistment in the Navy or Marine Corps will be informed that he must submit to typhoid prophylaxis, and unless he agrees to acquiesce in this procedure he will not be considered eligible for enlistment.

"3. Typhoid prophylaxis must be regarded as a supplemental safeguard, and under no circumstances will the usual sanitary precautions be modified or set aside.

"4. The antityphoid serum should be obtained from the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery by telegraphic or written request.

G. V. L. MEYER,  
Secretary of the Navy."

For a long time it has been believed that other measures such as improved

sanitation were of greater importance in the prevention of this disease and as the Order says, "under no circumstances will the usual sanitary precautions be modified or set aside." But a careful study of the history of typhoid in the Navy shows that the principal drop in typhoid rate was synchronous with this order, although other factors changed but little. Before this time every large naval hospital had a typhoid ward and often it was well filled. After antityphoid inoculation was introduced the disease declined to such an extent that a medical officer with twenty-seven years' service, who entered the Navy in 1913, stated that he had never seen a case of typhoid fever

in the Navy during the whole period of his service, and in 1938 the annual report of the Surgeon General shows but seven cases admitted in the entire Navy for that year.

After retirement, Admiral Stokes lived in New York City until his death, which occurred October 29, 1931, in his sixty-eighth year. As may be seen from the portrait accompanying this sketch, this Surgeon General was a remarkably fine-looking man and was often referred to as "the handsomest man in the Navy." The picture shows also the old special full-dress coat well known to older officers, but which has not been worn since the World War.

